

The Milosevic Trial: Key prosecution witness discredited

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The testimony of a key prosecution witness claiming intimate knowledge of Slobodan Milosevic's inner circle was thoroughly discredited last month. Milosevic is on trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, accused of crimes against humanity.

Radomir Tanic, a 46-year-old businessman is one of a handful of Serbs to give evidence at the ICTY. He appeared before the court with his face shielded and is now living under a witness relocation programme.

Tanic co-founded the Civic Alliance of Serbia in 1992 on a programme "to overcome nationalist and class collectivism" and introduce capitalist market reforms. At about the same time he established contacts with British, Italian and Russian intelligence services. He insisted in court he was not an agent, but was involved in "co-operation on analytical affairs" and later acted as an intermediary between the intelligence services and the Yugoslav government.

Two years later Tanic, along with a number of influential businessmen, is said to have joined the Novo Demokracija party (New Democracy or ND) shortly after it ensured Milosevic's political survival by entering into a coalition government with him. They justified their defection from the opposition DEPOS coalition by saying it was necessary to work for change from within the ND. Their six assembly representatives were richly rewarded with four ministerial posts. At the time, Tanic praised their pragmatism.

Tanic told the court that soon after he joined ND he became a member of its executive board and special advisor on international affairs to ND president and current minister of the interior, Dusan Mihajlovic.

Tanic claimed he was authorised by Mihajlovic, Milosevic and Jovica Stanisic, chief of the Serbian intelligence service (SDB), to be the principal negotiator with the Kosovar Albanian leaders such as current Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova. In the course of his work, Tanic said he had 20 meetings with Milosevic and up to three meetings a week with the SDB. He also said he had a close relationship to Serbian TV chief Dusan Mitevic—who he described as one of

Milosevic's "most trusted associates"—and Momcilo Perisic, commander of the Yugoslav Army, who provided a lot of his information.

According to Tanic, all concerned including Milosevic and the Western powers agreed to his plan to negotiate a settlement for the Kosovo crisis but then Milosevic started to back off. When Tanic met Ratko Markovic, former vice president of Serbia, he claimed Markovic told him that Milosevic had "ordered that he would not negotiate seriously with the Kosovo Albanians" but instead welcomed the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) murder of Serbs in order to raise tensions and provide a reason for ethnically cleansing the Kosovar Albanians. Milosevic, Tanic continued, became "intent on conflict" and "had nothing against a small-scale bombing operation" by NATO.

During Tanic's appearance at the trial, some of those he named disputed his version of events. The ND issued a press release saying, "The content of the testimony of Radomir Tanic testifies to his attempt to construct a story in which ND did not take part in the way in which he has presented this, nor did he have the importance that he wishes to attach to himself. According to our knowledge, Tanic least of all could have been a partner to Milosevic in carrying out some kind of plan in order to restore Kosovo its autonomy."

The press release added that no one was aware of his contacts with intelligence agencies at home or abroad. It alluded to the possibility of Tanic being bought and paid for, concluding, "Imagination does all sorts of things and sometimes necessity even more than that ... whether anybody else instrumentalised Mr Tanic we cannot know."

The ND vice president Nebojsa Seleskovic was more explicit as to why he thought Tanic was appearing at the tribunal: "Tanic in Belgrade ran up a lot of debts and in the autumn of 1999 he just disappeared from Belgrade and then he agreed to testify in The Hague for a sum of money."

Ratko Markovic issued a statement saying he did not meet Tanic and that the position of the Yugoslav government had not changed from 1998 until the start of NATO bombing.

Of course these former associates of Milosevic could be

denying Tanic's role in order to protect their skins and prevent their own prosecution. But during Tanic's cross-examination, it became obvious that much of his testimony was second-hand and at the very least inconsistent. On several occasions he tried to change his testimony or blame inconsistencies on bad translation.

This led Judge Richard May to tell the prosecution that the evidence was "important but based on sources which either are not given or are said to be given in private session. The question is the value of that evidence and whether it should be admitted at all." Judge Kwon also remarked, "Now your version of the story is a little bit different" after Tanic changed his role in the Kosovo talks from principal negotiator to the "driving force" behind them. That he had no role whatsoever was suggested when another prosecution witness, Adnan Merovci, appeared at the ICTY a few days later. Merovci, who was Ibrahim Rugova's secretary during the 1990s, told the court he met Tanic once at a conference in 1992 but, "I personally never knew Mr Tanic and I don't think someone from us met him." There were never any negotiations with him, he added.

Tanic acted as if the Yugoslav leadership gave him personal authorisation, but it emerged later that there were "no personal instructions" but only "general principles" passed down through subordinates. He never met SDB chief Stanisic and the 20 meetings with Milosevic turned out to be a handful of encounters at receptions where there were thousands of guests. As Tanic explained, "Mr Milosevic was a gracious host, he tried to talk at least a bit to each and every guest." Finally he admitted, "I think we met each other once, but it wasn't in secret. It wasn't clandestinely, I think, but I don't know."

In his cross examination Milosevic, who is mounting his own defence, pointed out that Dusan Mitevic was replaced as TV chief in 1991 and became head of the election campaign for Milosevic's opponent, Milan Panic, in 1993. It was therefore impossible for Tanic to say Mitevic was one of Milosevic's "most trusted associates" during the Kosovo negotiations after 1996. Milosevic also drew attention to the arrest of Momcilo Perisic by the Serbian authorities last year, on charges of being an American spy, so questioning the value of his information.

Tanic also backtracked on his statement that he had heard Milosevic himself talk about ethnic cleansing. He changed his testimony to say it was individuals around Milosevic who spoke of throwing the Albanians out of Kosovo and that "the accused never said this, I want this to be understood." He then admitted he had not actually heard Milosevic's associates say the words "ethnic cleansing", but it was his own conclusion from the way they spoke.

Tanic's explanation for his early life was also shrouded in

mystery. When Milosevic produced a 1977 Serbian court document saying Tanic had been sentenced for robbery, Tanic at first claimed it was a forgery and refused to discuss it. After lengthy questioning by the judges, Tanic admitted he was sentenced in 1977 but claimed that he couldn't remember what offence he was charged with. Tanic also refused to answer questions about his educational qualifications, after it emerged that he did not have the university degree his admission card to the ND stated.

The unreliable evidence produced by Tanic has been yet another setback for the prosecution, which has received mounting criticism in the world's media. The right wing British *Daily Telegraph* for example has called the proceedings a badly prepared and poorly executed "opera".

It has also been a setback for the British intelligence service, which cultivated Tanic as a tool of imperialist intrigue in the Balkans. It emerged during the trial that the British security services paid Tanic 5,000 euros in "cash with no records" in 1999 to research a book on Serb victims in Kosovo to send to the ICTY. As a result of his research Tanic was kidnapped, drugged and tortured for two days. This was the reason he cited for his disappearance from Belgrade. In a twist to this story, Tanic explained that "these individuals said that they were the people who wanted to overthrow Milosevic, in fact, and that everything I went through was a test on their part to see how fit I was to survive and that they wanted me to link them up to the people from the British intelligence service so that we could co-operate in toppling Mr Milosevic."



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